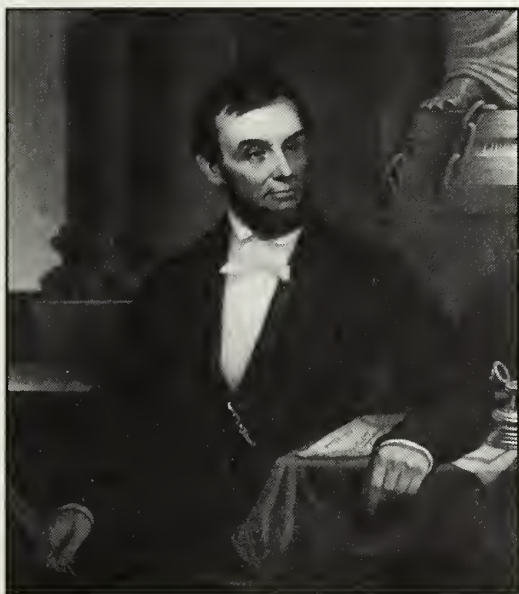


The Emancipation Proclamation



Engraving by John Sartain from a painting by Edward
Marchant, Bradley & Co., Philadelphia, 1864

The Lincoln Museum
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Historical Background of the Emancipation Proclamation

The institution of slavery was the focus of political conflict in the United States from the 1830s to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Abraham Lincoln, the Republican candidate for president in 1860, personally abhorred slavery and was pledged to prevent it from spreading into the western territories. At the same time, he believed that the Constitution did not allow the federal government to prohibit slavery in states where it already existed.

The election of Lincoln led to the secession of eleven slave-holding states and the beginning of civil war. Four slave-holding states remained in the Union: Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware. Lincoln believed that their loyalty was crucial to the survival of the Union. When one of his generals announced the emancipation of slaves in Missouri in 1861, Lincoln overruled him out of fear that such a policy might cause one or more of the border states to secede.

By 1862, more and more slaves were escaping and seeking refuge with Union armies. Lincoln recognized that the extraordinary pressure of war was gradually destroying the institution of slavery, even without legal emancipation. The pressure of war, Lincoln believed, also gave him

constitutional authority to declare emancipation as a military measure necessary to save the Union.

In July 1862, Lincoln read a draft of the Emancipation Proclamation to his Cabinet. Secretary of State William Seward suggested that Lincoln wait to issue it until after a Union victory, so that it would not sound like the last desperate act of a losing government. Lincoln agreed, and waited for his generals to win a battle.

The battle of Antietam, September 17, 1862, was the bloodiest single day of the war. Robert E. Lee's Confederate army retreated after the battle, allowing Union General George B. McClellan to claim victory. Five days later, on September 22, 1862, Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation.

The preliminary Proclamation announced that slaves in rebel states not under Union control would become free on January 1, 1863. Lincoln thus gave the Southern states one last chance to end the war before losing their slaves, an opportunity they rejected. The Proclamation did not affect slaves in the Union states; Lincoln still needed the allegiance of the border states in order to win the war. It was clear to all, however, that slavery would not long survive anywhere once the Proclamation took effect.

On January 1, 1863, Lincoln signed the final Emancipation Proclamation. He had been shaking hands all day at a New Year's reception, and his hand was unsteady when he grasped the pen. He set it back down and said, "If my name ever goes into history it will be for this act, and my whole soul is in it. If my hand trembles when I sign the Proclamation, all who examine the document hereafter will say, 'He hesitated.'" Then he slowly and firmly wrote "Abraham Lincoln," looked up, smiled, and said, "That will do."

Lincoln signed 48 souvenir copies printed by Charles G. Leland and George H. Boker. These were offered for sale at the Great Central Sanitary Commission Fair held June 7-29, 1864. Proceeds from the sale benefited the United States Sanitary Commission, a civilian charity that supplied doctors, nurses, ambulances and medical supplies to Union soldiers during the Civil War. Fewer than half of the 48 copies are thought to exist today. Of those still in existence, only The Lincoln Museum copy is included in a permanent exhibition; seven others are rotated in and out of temporary exhibitions.

A Proclamation.

A new copy, with the original diagnosis of the Pool and to (no. two) and (three).

71.2009.084.11757